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The 18th annual inventory, called the "Pig Book," ranges from \$195,000 for a program to help ex-convicts in Memphis, Tenn. adjust to life outside prison walls, to \$1.6 million for tracking the health of soldiers with advanced implantable nano-sensors.

Citizens Against Government Waste, a non-partisan advocacy group that opposes what it sees as waste and inefficiency in the federal government, culled through spending items using several criteria.

### **Serving only a local interest**

For example, the projects it selected had to serve only a local interest, were not requested by an executive branch department, and weren't the subject of any congressional hearings, meaning money for them was handed out without public scrutiny.

The group named three Republicans on the Senate Appropriations Committee as the top "porkers" of 2008. Combined, the trio was responsible for more than \$1.8 billion in projects.

Taking the honors:

Sen. Thad Cochran, R-Miss. (\$892 million)

Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Ala. (\$469 million)

Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala. (\$465 million)

CAGW also needled Maine Sens. Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe for sponsoring \$188,000 for their state's Lobster Institute.

### **A case of narcissism?**

In addition, CAGW mockingly honored House Ways and Means Committee chairman Rep. Charles Rangel, D- N.Y. with its "Narcissist Award" for the \$1.95 million which went to the "Charles B. Rangel Center for Public Service" at the City College of New York.

Last year, Rep. John Campbell, R- Calif. protested the federal money going to the Rangel project. "I really do not think this is a road we want to go down, where we, as Members, have the ability to create and name things after ourselves using public funds while we are in office," he said.

But Rangel promptly took to the House floor to defend himself, explaining that \$25 million in private funds had been raised for the center, based on the use of his name.

"As flattered as I am that they are using my name, I am thoroughly convinced that the only reason they are using my name is the ability to attract funds to get this thing going," Rangel told Campbell.

He also told the California Republican that "in my community, where only four out of 10 kids manage to finish high school, I've devoted my entire life in working with the public

**and private sector in trying to keep our kids in school... As we move toward globalization, it is going to be far more important for every young person ...to get the education, and to compete."**

**Rangel told Campbell that "I would have a problem if you did it" — had federal money funneled to a center with Campbell's name on it.**

**"I don't think that you've been around long enough that having your name on something to inspire a building like this in a school," Rangel said.**

**Campbell was first elected to the House in 2005, Rangel in 1970.**

### **Only a small fraction of total spending**

Despite the criticism which CAGW aimed at the spending projects, two constants remain true this year, as in previous years.

One constant is that even at \$17.2 billion, earmarked projects remain a tiny portion — about six-tenths of one percent — of the \$2.7 trillion in total federal spending.

Compared to entitlement programs such as Medicare and Medicaid, which automatically provide benefits to anyone legally eligible for them, earmarked spending is small. Taxpayers spent \$628 billion on Medicare and Medicaid last year, \$610 billion more than this year's barrel of "pork."

CAGW's focus on what might seem outlandish or superfluous spending projects partly diverts attention from the far bigger and politically sacrosanct programs such as Medicare that are on "automatic pilot."

"They're missing the boat," said Joseph Antos, a former official at the Congressional Budget Office, of the CAGW study. Antos is now a fiscal analyst at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative Washington think tank. "But so are the senators and congressmen who complain about this ('pork') spending. This is chicken feed compared to the big entitlements."

The other constant in the annual "Pig Book" ritual is that many, if not most, of the projects detailed in CAGW's inventory are not the oddball and obscure such as the Lobster Institute, but the everyday meat-and-potatoes operations of state and municipal governments, such as local bus systems or low-income housing programs for older people.

Earmarks took on a bad reputation after Rep. Randy Cunningham, R- Calif. pleaded guilty in 2005 to tax evasion and taking bribes from contractors, including the former president of a firm for which Cunningham had earmarked a defense spending project.

Cunningham is now serving his sentence at the federal prison in Tucson and is scheduled to be released in 2013.

### **Debating the case for earmarks**

One argument against earmarks is that the taxpayers of Tennessee and Texas shouldn't be required to spend money on construction of low-income housing for senior citizens in Willington, Conn., or for streetscape improvements for North Main Street in Enfield, Conn.

Some critics contend that if the people in Willington or Enfield really wanted those projects, they

could have imposed higher local and state taxes on themselves to pay for them.

But Rep. Joe Courtney, D- Conn., who is credited with the Willington and Enfield spending items in this year's CAGW study, said, "This new Congress has dramatically improved the scrutiny and transparency of the appropriations process after years of abuse by previous Republican-controlled Congresses."

He added, "Congressional oversight and direction of some Federal spending projects continue to be important because Members of Congress work with local leaders and can often understand local priorities better than federal agencies in Washington, D.C. Whether in eastern Connecticut or southern Louisiana, these investments are important to our economy and help address the huge unmet infrastructure needs of this nation."